

Now in her fifties, my mother's health is strong and she seems to endure all tension. My father once said that women like my mother did not get high blood pressure—they gave it away. Maybe that is why he has it. She works, she prays, she reads Norman Vincent Peale and sends mass cards when distant relatives die. Her job pays well, but is draining her. She is a different kind of mother now. She and I rarely go to the movies anymore and shopping for school clothes is too exhausting after work. At one time when she smiled her eyes would widen and rows of perfectly-formed, coffee-stained teeth would reach into her tawny little dimples. That smile would take away all my sadness. Now I deal with my own sadness and my mother, with hers.

She is caught in the middle of her life with my younger sister who does not obey or act as my mother would like her to—she does not act like me. My sister likes to stay out late, flirt with boys from other high schools, and wear layers of outrageous make-up. My mother prays for her to be good and cannot wait until she gets married. She and my father quarrel over my sister and they threaten to leave each other when, in the middle of the night, she has not yet come home. Sometimes I wish my sister was never born. My mother often asks me for advice, but I do not know what to tell her.

My mother is a weakening spirit that has been tired for too long than seems fair or natural. She works so hard to make us so middle-class happy. I want her to be young again, and tell us that everything is wonderful, and I want for her to believe it, too.

Presence

by Sarah Hill

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You have become like the moon to me,
rising on the night.
You surprise me with the light of your face
and the quick catch of its whiteness.
The gray scars of your cheek
are cool shadows at your height.
The shine of your dead expression
is merely the reflection of your sun.
Piece by piece you open up
into my window— a familiar face.
Mother, my mother, why do you roll away
from me into the dark?